Oliver Twist

Oliver Twist (first published in 1838) is Charles Dickens second novel. It is one of the earliest English novels, to draw public attention to the social evil norms of the time according to which poor people were made to work in the workhouses and children were often pushed to work as criminals.

Orphaned because his mother died at childbirth and his father disappeard, Oliver Twist was born into a life of poverty and misfortune in a workhouse. After spending nine years at a child farm, Oliver is moved to another workhouse.

The novel traces his life through all the problems that he encounters till he finally meets his mother's sister and forms a relationship.

Designed for school-going students, this book contains features which promote language skills such as graded comprehension tasks and exercises for the development of writing skills.

macmillan education

Macmillan Publishers India Pvt. Ltd.
www.macmillaneducation.in

₹ 110
ISBN 9350376055
9 789350 376059
Weight: 152 g

Oliver Twist

macmillan education

macmillan education

Charles Dickens

Oliver Twist

MACMILLAN

© *Katharine Lang* 1969, 2008

All rights reserved under the copyright act. No part of this publication may be reproduced, transcribed, transmitted, stored in a retrieval system or translated into any language or computer language, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, magnetic, optical, chemical, manual, photocopy or otherwise without the prior permission of the copyright owner. Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

First published 1969
Reprinted 1966–2007 (Forty-three impressions)
New edition 2008
Reprinted 2008–2011 (Six impressions), 2012, 2013, 2014 (Four impressions), 2015 (Twice), 2016
Revised edition 2017
Reprinted 2017 (Twice)

MACMILLAN PUBLISHERS INDIA PRIVATE LIMITED
Delhi Bengaluru Chennai Kolkata Mumbai
Ahmedabad Bhopal Chandigarh Coimbatore
Cuttack Guwahati Hyderabad Jaipur Lucknow Madurai
Nagpur Patna Pune Thiruvananthapuram Visakhapatnam

ISBN: 978-9350-37405-4

Published by Macmillan Publishers India Private Ltd,
21, Patullos Road, Chennai 600002, India

Printed at : Tara Art Printers Pvt. Ltd., Noida

'This book is meant for educational and learning purposes. The author(s) of the book has/have taken all reasonable care to ensure that the contents of the book do not violate any copyright or other intellectual property rights of any person in any manner whatsoever. In the event the author(s) has/have been unable to track any source and if any copyright has been inadvertently infringed, please notify the publisher in writing for any corrective action.'

Introduction

A Note on the Author

'A loving heart is the truest wisdom ...'

Charles John Huffam Dickens (7 February 1812 – 9 June 1870) aptly described himself as a man who possessed the most loving heart that longed to sensitively reach out to his readers and touch their lives with his incredible expressions of wisdom. Though he espoused the realities of life most honestly and boldly he was just a boy at heart that sought to be errant and adventurous like his little heroes, alive to all possibilities, with an unyielding optimism. A prolific writer, he penned novels, plays, short stories, fiction and non-fiction. Everything he saw translated itself into his stories with incredible global appeal and penmanship that evolved from 'a heart that never hardened, and a temper that never tired, and a touch that never hurt'. He was the ultimate Victorian author with his unforgettable stories, wild characters and a vivid depiction of life in his times.

Early Years

- Charles John Huffam Dickens was born on 7 February 1812, in Portsea Island (Portsmouth). He was the second of the eight children of John and Elizabeth Dickens. He came from a humble family where his father was a clerk in the Navy Pay Office.
- When Charles was four, they relocated to Chatham, Kent, until he was 11. Till his teens he had a near perfect life, though he called himself a 'very small and not-over-particularly-taken-care-of boy' and Dickens was blessed to hold wonderful memories of people and events that often reflected in his writings later on.

- In 1822, the Dickens' family moved to Camden Town, a poor neighbourhood in London when John Dickens was recalled to Navy Pay Office headquarters. By then the family's miserable financial situation had grown worse, as he had an ugly habit of living beyond his income. As a final insult, John was sent to Marshalsea debtors' prison in Southwark, London, in 1824 by his debtors. His wife and children were permitted to join him.
- Charles was just 12 years old and an impressionable young boy who ended up residing with Elizabeth Roylance, a family friend, at Camden Town. She herself was a poverty stricken old lady. Consequently he survived in a back-attic in the house of an agent for the Insolvent Court, Archibald Russell.
- On holidays Charles spent the day with his sisters at the Marshalsea, a setting he used in *Little Dorrit*.
- Dickens was forced to leave school eventually and work ten-hour a day at the rat-ridden Warren's Blacking Warehouse with rotten floorboards and miserable working conditions, where he earned a little amount pasting labels on pots of boot blacking. His task was to cover the pots of paste-blacking 'until it looked as smart as a pot of ointment from an apothecary's shop'. This added to the dwindling family income. Though the exacting and miserable working conditions scarred Dickens for life, it conceived his interest in socio-economic and labour reform.
- On the expectation of his grandmother's legacy John Dickens was released from prison and repaid his creditors. Though the family finally escaped Marshalsea and returned, Elizabeth Dickens discouraged Charles' return from the blacking warehouse. Dickens often complained, 'how I could have been so easily cast away at such an age'.
- Dickens took serious offence and thus his view that 'a father should rule the family, and a mother find her proper sphere inside the home'. This explained his dissatisfaction towards women. It was this wretched phase of his early youth to which he refers in his most autobiographical novel, *David Copperfield*: **'I had no advice, no counsel, no encouragement, no consolation, no assistance, no support of any kind, from anyone, that I can call to mind…!'** Dickens saw it as the ultimate dereliction of duty by his parents and felt deceived and abandoned.
- Dickens was 15 when he had to drop out of school again and work as an office boy to contribute to his family's income, but it was an ideal launch pad for his literary career. Dickens anyway disliked Wellington House Academy in Camden Town.
- He worked at the law office as a junior clerk from 1827 to 1828. He remained a source of amusement as he mimicked clients, lawyers and clerks and went to theatres religiously.
- He learned shorthand and became a freelance reporter on the legal proceedings for nearly four years.
- Despite the lack of formal education, 'he edited a weekly journal for 20 years, wrote 15 novels, five novellas, hundreds of short stories and non-fiction articles, lectured and performed extensively, was an indefatigable letter writer, and campaigned vigorously for children's rights, education, and other social reforms'.

Personal Life

- Dickens met his first love, Maria Beadnell in 1830. Perhaps she inspired the character Dora in *David Copperfield*. However, Maria's parents disapproved of the relationship and the romance was nipped in the bud when Maria was quickly sent away to a school in Paris.
- Charles Dickens was a regular visitor to the Fulham house, and enjoyed the company of George Hogarth's (editor of the *Evening Chronicle*) daughters—Georgina, Mary and nineteen-year-old Catherine Hogarth.
- In 1836, after a year long engagement, Dickens married Catherine. The first of their ten children, Charley, was born in 1837, and a few months later the family set up home in London.

- Catherine was expecting their second child when Mary, who had being staying with them, suddenly died of heart failure. For Dickens Mary was a symbol of goodness and innocence taken away by evil death, something like his first fairy tale love, the innocent Little Red Riding Hood. Grief-stricken he preserved her memories and even wished to be buried next to her upon his death.
- In 1842, Dickens and his wife made their first trip to the United States and Canada. At this time Georgina Hogarth, another sister of Catherine, joined them as housekeeper, babysitter and friend until Dickens' death in 1870.
- In 1857, Dickens hired professional actresses for his play *The Frozen Deep*. Dickens was besotted with one of the actresses, Ellen Ternan, and this secret relationship lasted for the rest of his life.

Trials in Life

- Dickens felt betrayed by his parents when he was forced to work in the rat-infested blacking factory for 6 shillings. Despite the horror of it that haunted young Dickens he used his past misery to inspire his boyish characters who underwent the rigours of life after the Industrial Revolution.
- In 1852 the family suffered immensely—Catherine had a nervous breakdown; John Dickens died, tragically the couple's nine-month-old daughter, Dora, died as well.
- Even though he seemed to enjoy a huge success in America Dickens was horrified by the attention—'They flock around me as if I were an idol,'—but he disliked the invasion of his privacy.
- In 1865, Dickens was in a disastrous Staplehurst rail crash as the train plunged off a bridge that was under repair. Dickens barely survived as his carriage remained on the track. Dickens came to the rescue of the victims and even saved some lives. He even remembered the unfinished manuscript for *Our Mutual Friend*, in the carriage and retrieved it. Despite his fragile medical condition he continued his reading tours.

Mentors

- Dickens drew his inspiration primarily from his personal experiences, life events and the people he had met, thus most of his works seem autobiographical.
- He also penned the social and technological transitions in Victorian society, the law courts, the social absurdities, 'the weaknesses in the Utilitarian philosophy and the bureaucracy of the business world'.
- Dickens was inspired in theatrical collaborations with novelists Wilkie Collins. When Dickens acted in his play *The Frozen Deep*, he was inspired by his own role as a self-sacrificing lover (Sydney Carton).
- As a young boy, he was greatly influenced by the stories his nursemaid used to tell him. Also, Dickens loved to read books like *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes, *Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding, and *Arabian Nights*, which were picaresque novels (loosely linked episodic adventures) which motivated Dickens to serialize his works.
- Thomas Carlyle's book The *French Revolution* inspired Charles to write a novel set in the French Revolution

An Example for Children to Emulate

- 'No one is useless in this world who lightens the burdens of another.' Charles worked with a burning desire to undo the social and political disaster created in the lives of the economically ignored and socially unwanted section.
- He inspired great optimism in the hearts of the young and old, the rich and the poor with his prodigious words of wisdom on the need for an egalitarian society– 'The sun—the bright sun, that brings back, not light alone, but new life, and hope, and freshness to man—burst upon the crowded city in clear and radiant glory. Through costly-coloured glass and paper-mended window, through cathedral dome and rotten crevice, it shed its equal ray.' (*Oliver Twist*)

- Dickens brought back the age old charm of festivities and family bonhomie through *Christmas Carol* in a world ridden with materialism and emphasized the return of human goodness. 'Remember! It is Christianity to do good always even to those who do evil to us. It is Christianity to love our neighbours as ourself, and to do to all men as we would have them do to us. It is Christianity to be gentle, merciful and forgiving, and to keep those qualities quiet in our own hearts, and never make a boast of them or of our prayers or of our love of God, but always to show that we love Him by humbly trying to do right in everything…'
- Two prayers by Dickens set the roadmap for stitching the moral fabric of any society irrespective of nationality, class, colour or gender.

1. 'We humbly beseech thee O Father that we may be honest and true in all our dealings, and gentle and merciful to the faults of others, remembering of how much gentleness and mercy we stand in need ourselves…'

2. 'Hear our supplications on behalf of the poor, the sick, the destitute, and guilty, and for thy blessing on the diffusion of increased happiness, knowledge, and comfort among the great mass of mankind… Amen.'

- Dickens' generosity for a cause and his philanthropic actions were well known. At the request of Angela Burdett Coutts, heir to a banking fortune, Dickens set up a home for saving fallen women of the working class and called it 'Urania Cottage' from which hundreds of women graduated.

Books

- His literary career began with his first story (1833)—*A Dinner at Poplar Walk.*
- His journalism did well in a novel form of unique sketches in weekly periodicals, called '*Sketches by Boz*'—a family nickname he employed as a pseudonym. He adopted the name from the nickname 'Moses' when pronounced by anyone with a head cold. Moses—Boses—*Boz*
- ***The Pickwick Papers:*** A set of ly linked sketches and changing characters featured in reports to the Pickwick Club that recount the comic adventures of Rochester, Dingley Dell, and Bath.
- ***Oliver Twist:*** It is the story of an orphan living in the streets autobiographically inspired by how Dickens felt as a poor child forced to get by on his wits, survive and earn his keep in the cruel and insensitive world.
- ***Nicholas Nickleby:*** Is a bitter attack on the Yorkshire schools where unwanted children were sent. The funny picaresque adventures are of young Nicholas with the travelling theatrical troupe.
- ***A Christmas Carol:*** Features the famous Ebenezer Scrooge, a miserbale, old miser, who, with the help of a ghost, finds the Christmas spirit.
- ***Dombey and Son:*** A powerful tragedy of a distant, cold businessman who comes to realize too late the value of his worthy daughter, Florence,
- ***David Copperfield:*** The plot involves topics of broken romance, financial insecurity and misdoings, and the terrible force of the legal system which haunted Dickens all his life.
- ***Bleak House:*** An attack on the legal system, a satire on foolish philanthropy, exciting melodrama and an interesting use of point of view.
- ***Hard Times:*** The book highlights the social and economic pressures of the English society.
- ***Little Dorrit:*** Deals with themes of prison, debt and the negative effects of wealth.
- ***A Tale of Two Cities:*** An account of the French Revolution—with the story switching between London and Paris. It observes the causes and effects of the Revolution from a personal view, showing how own experience relates to public history.

- ***Great Expectations:*** A deep look at the moral education of a boy who has been victimized and deceived but whose essential goodness of heart finally rescues him from social snobbery and delusion.
- **Travelogue:** Description of Dickens impressions of America; a condemnation of slavery, the emancipation of the poverty ridden people in England.

The popularity he gained as a writer changed his perception about himself. He felt he had become a 'cultural commodity'. This made him interested in creating new public and personal characters.

Dickensian Writer

- Gilbert Keith Chesterton called him **'the voice in England of this humane intoxication and expansion, this encouraging of anybody to be anything.'**
- The term Dickensian became a phenomenon—'such as poor social conditions or comically repulsive characters'.
- Dickens was the most popular voice of Victorian England. He wrote continuously to meet the 'serialisation' demands of the masses and is ranked only second to William Shakespeare among English writers. The serial format allowed him to recognise the readers' reaction and modify his story and characters based on their feedback.
- He wrote with an unmistakable *joie de vivre*—'Happy, happy Christmas, that can win us back to the delusions of our childish days; that can recall to the old man the pleasures of his youth; that can transport the sailor and the traveller, thousands of miles away, back to his own fire-side and his quiet home!'
- Dickens wrote from his personal knowledge of 'the streets, people, parks, alleys, markets and lanes of London', which made his writing vivid and aligned to mass appeal. His experiences gave him a first-hand insight into poverty and made him an effective voice of change for the working classes.

- He dared to point out society's tragic cracks, its rising materialistic greed and its unpardonable indifference to the lower classes.
- His creative genius was praised by renowned writers—for its 'realism, comedy, prose style, unique characterizations, and social criticism'.
- His stories ranged from fantasy to realism to humour, e.g, his pun on snobbery—'Noble Refrigerator; compared orphans to stocks and shares; people to tug boats, or dinner-party guests to furniture.'
- Colourful names filled the pages, e.g, Ebenezer Scrooge, Tiny Tim, Oliver Twist, The Artful Dodger, Fagin, Bill Sikes, Pip, David Copperfield, Samuel Pickwick, and Uriah Heep.
- Humorous incidents and characters filled his stories but the underlying serious themes and insights into human nature could not be missed. 'There is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good humour.'

Dickens' Death

- Dickens gave a series of 'farewell readings' in England, Scotland and Ireland, but was severely affected by dizziness, fits of paralysis and even collapsed in 1869.
- On 8 June 1870, Dickens suffered another stroke at his home after working on *Edwin Drood* (left incomplete) and failed to regain consciousness. Five years to the day after the Staplehurst rail crash Charles Dickens died of a stroke at home on 9 June 1870. He was buried in the almost empty and silent Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.
- The inscription on his tomb reads: **'He was a sympathiser to the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed; and by his death, one of England's greatest writers is lost to the world.'**

Commemorations

- Dickens was commemorated on the Series E £10 note issued by the Bank of England that circulated between 1992 and 2003.

His portrait appeared on the reverse of the note accompanied by a scene from *The Pickwick Papers*. The royal Mint issued a £2 circulating coin on his 200th birthday (2011).

- The Charles Dickens School is a high school in Broadstairs, Kent.
- A theme park, Dickens World, standing in part on the site of the former naval dockyard where Dickens' father once worked in the Navy Pay Office, opened in Chatham in 2007.
- To celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Dickens, the Museum of London in 2012 held the UK's first major exhibition on the author in 40 years.
- Each year on the anniversary of Dickens' birth a wreath is laid on the grave.

Summary of the Novel

'The tears which fell, and the broken words which were exchanged in the long, close embrace between the orphans, be sacred. A father, sister, and mother, were gained, and lost, in that one moment. Joy and grief were mingled in the cup; but there were no bitter tears: for even grief arose so softened, and clothed in such sweet and tender recollections, that it became a solemn pleasure, and lost all character of pain.'

Charles Dickens concerns himself with poverty and social injustice post 19th century Industrial Revolution that might leave readers despairing, but resolves the end with the promise of an egalitarian society. The social novel, satirizes the double standards of his time, including the recruitment of children as child labour, crime and criminals and the miseries of poor and street children.

Oliver Twist or ***The Parish Boy's Progress*** is a picaresque or sequential novel. It is the story of Oliver Twist, who starts his orphaned life in a workhouse and is then sold off to an undertaker. The young protagonist is overwhelmed by the miseries that plague his innocent life, but his honest goodness shines forth

despite the horrors, as charity and love defeat the most devilish plans. Despite the despicable and heinous treatment by society Oliver's 'sturdy spirit' helps him to survive and endure all cruelties. Dickens' own childhood experiences colour the story line but in the good versus evil, the good of Oliver remains uncorrupted.

Workhouse years

- The story starts dramatically with a brewing storm as a poor woman labours to give birth to her child in the parish workhouse in an unnamed town (Mudfog). The baby is born, but tragically the mother dies at childbirth just after holding and kissing her newborn. Old Sally, her nurse, attending her, takes from the dying woman a locket and ring.
- The innocent child is orphaned at birth with the death of his mother and the absence of his father. Under the terms of the Poor Laws he spends the first nine years of his life living at a baby farm in the care of a woman named Mrs Mann. Brought up with little care, attention or food and even lesser comforts or affection, little Oliver inherits a life of poverty and misfortune.
- Consequently Mr Bumble, the parish beadle, names the boy Oliver Twist and removes him from the baby farm and puts him to work picking and weaving oakum at a workhouse. The man is undoubtedly awful with no soft spot for the children under his care. Despite being a church official he has little fear of God and mistreats the boys. Oliver (and the other boys), who toils with very little food, remains in the workhouse for six months.
- One day, the desperately hungry boys decide to ask for another portion of gruel. The fearful task falls to Oliver, who dares to comes up forward, bowl in hand, and shaking with fear begs Mr Bumble for soup with his famous request: '**Please, sir, I want some more**'. Great chaos follows his unbelievable incredible demand and he is seen as a future rebel.
- The board members running the workhouse visualise Oliver as a troublemaker too and quickly offer £5 to any person

wishing to take on the boy as an apprentice. He is nearly sold to Mr Gamfield, a chimney sweep, a very dangerous business where small boys were often smothered as they were lowered into stuffy, narrow chimneys. However, when Oliver pleads not to be sent away with 'that dreadful man', the kindly old magistrate gives in.

- Later, Mr Sowerberry, an undertaker employed by the parish, takes Oliver into his service. He treats Oliver better and, because of the boy's sorrowful expression, uses him as a mourner at children's funerals.
- His wife, who seems to enjoy making her husband miserable, takes an immediate dislike to Oliver. Mr Sowerberry seems to like him and so she takes every opportunity to mistreat the boy.
- Oliver is also constantly teased and bullied by Noah Claypole, a fellow apprentice who is jealous of Oliver. Charlotte, the Sowerberrys' maidservant, who is in love with Noah also does not spare him.
- Noah insults Oliver's mother, by calling her 'a regular right-down bad 'un'. Furious at the mounting insults, Oliver attacks and beats the bigger boy. Mrs Sowerberry takes Noah's side and even helps him to beat up Oliver. She eventually forces her husband and Mr Bumble, to punish Oliver for his misconduct.
- The poor child weeps all night and the next day he runs away from the Sowerberrys' house to London.
- During his journey to London, Oliver 'luckily' meets Jack Dawkins who promises him safety, work and shelter. Dodger skillfully or rather 'artfully' provides Oliver with a free meal and promise to introduce him to a 'gentleman' in London who would 'give him lodgings for nothing, and never ask for change'. The runaway child is thankful for the generosity and follows Dodger unsuspectingly.
- Unknown to him, the boy is a member of a gang of juvenile pickpockets. The 'Artful Dodger', and his accomplice, Charley

Bates, dupe the naive Oliver and plan to lead him into the clutches of an elderly criminal, Fagin.

- Oliver meets Fagin, the so-called gentleman and lives with his new found friends at Saffron Hill unaware of their criminal background. He believed they made wallets and handkerchiefs.
- One day, Oliver also naïvely goes out to 'make handkerchiefs' with the Artful Dodger and Charley Bates. The juveniles steal the handkerchief of an old gentleman named Mr Brownlow, and promptly flee. However, finding his handkerchief missing, the man (Mr Brownlow) turns round just in time to see Oliver fleeing in fright, and chases him. Others join in and Oliver is caught and taken before the magistrate. Oliver finally realises that the real mission of his 'friends' is to pick pockets or rather steal.
- Strangely, Mr Brownlow is unconvinced about Oliver's criminal record. A bookstall owner who had witnessed the other boys commit the crime saves Oliver. Oliver faints in the courtroom and Mr Brownlow takes Oliver home and cares for him.
- Oliver stays with his benefactor and recovers rapidly with the unaccustomed attention, affection and kindness. His joy is short-lived because Fagin, fearing Oliver might betray to the authorities about his criminal gang, hatches a plan to kidnap the boy.
- One day when Mr Brownlow sends Oliver out to pay for some books, one of the gang members, Nancy with her lover, a robber named Bill Sikes, confronts Oliver and bundles him back to Fagin's lair.
- Meanwhile Brownlow thinks that Oliver has run away with his money unhappily concludes that Oliver was a thief after all. Bumble the beadle, answers to Mr Brownlow's advertisement in the paper, asking for information concerning Oliver. He too paints an evil picture of Oliver.
- The miscreants take away the five-pound note Mr Brownlow had entrusted with Oliver, and steal his fine new clothes.

Oliver tries to run, but is mercilessly dragged back by his 'friends', the Artful Dodger, Charley and Fagin. Nancy just manages to save him from a flogging.

- The evil Fagin is desperate for Oliver to participate in a burglary to 'criminalize' him. Nancy is forced to be an accomplice in forcing him into criminal ways. Sikes threatens to kill him if he does not cooperate. On the d-day Oliver is made to slip through a small window to unlock the front door and allow the thieves in.
- Fortunately the robbery is thwarted by the alert members of the house, but Oliver sustains a gunshot wound on his left arm. Quickly abandoned by co-conspirators, Oliver ends up under the care of Miss Rose and her guardian Mrs Maylie, the respectable members of the house they were supposed to rob.

Mystery

- Elsewhere a mysterious man named Monks contacts Fagin, plotting to defame and destroy Oliver's reputation. The duo agree on a fool proof plan to erase any memory of Oliver's past.
- Meanwhile Mr Bumble marries Mrs Corney, the rich matron of the workhouse, but it's an unhappy marriage with such a dominating wife.
- One day, Mr Bumble meets Monks and they talk about Oliver. Bumble reveals that he knows someone who can sell some information about the boy.
- Mrs Bumble tells Monk about the locket and ring which the old nurse had taken which had once belonged to Oliver's mother and they throw the last evidence into a nearby river. Monks recounts this to Fagin, but fortunately Nancy overhears their conversation and plans to inform Oliver's benefactors.
- Feeling guilty for kidnapping Oliver and sincerely regretful for the boy's safety, Nancy warns Rose Maylie and Mr Brownlow of Monk's and Fagin's plot. While leaving for one of her rendezvous Sikes and Fagin realise that Nancy is hiding something.

- The Artful Dodger is soon caught with stolen goods and convicted.
- Fagin's spies keep an eye on Nancy and inform Fagin that she has been secretly meeting Rose and Mr Brownlow. Sikes believes that her betrayal should not go unpunished and beats her to death in anger.
- He flees to the countryside to escape the police, but is haunted by visions of Nancy's eyes following him. Divine justice prevails and he ends up dying accidentally, hanging himself while attempting to escape an angry mob.

Resolution

- Mr Brownlow catches up with Monk and demands a full confession. It seems Monks is Edward Leeford, Oliver's half-brother who was born of a loveless marriage.
- Agnes Fleming was their father's Edwin Leeford's true love and Oliver was their child.
- Monks had witnessed his parents' failed marriage and eventual separation. Edwin sadly dies leaving Agnes to fend for herself.
- Edwin leaves everything to his unborn child in a will—the child would inherit his property if 'in his minority (young age) he should never have stained (ruined) his name with any public act of dishonor, meanness, cowardice, or wrong'. If the child became of ill repute (as Monks hoped) the inheritance would pass onto Edward (Monks).
- Mr Brownlow had already noticed the remarkable resemblance between Oliver and the painting of Agnes that hung in his house. He guesses the child's real identity. He advises Oliver to share his meager inheritance with Monks to give him 'a second chance'. Oliver happily agrees as he himself was appreciative of the second chance life had given him.
- Monks wastes his money, goes back to crime, and ultimately dies in prison.

- Fagin is subsequently arrested and condemned to the gallows. A day prior to his execution, Oliver and Mr Brownlow visit the condemned man in Newgate Gaol (pronounced as 'jail').
- Fagin's fear of Death has almost turned him insane and he suffers a high fever, but remains unrepentant of his sins, but redeems himself somewhat by revealing the location of some papers important for Oliver.
- Brownlow had been engaged to the sister of his friend Edwin Leeford, Monk's father. Leeford had been forced into a bad marriage. The couple had only one child, Monks. Leeford became attached to a retired naval officer's daughter, Agnes Fleming, but he died suddenly in Rome while looking after his inheritance when Agnes was expecting their child—the future Oliver Twist. Before leaving for Italy, Leeford had left the girl's picture with his friend Brownlow, which hung in his house.
- Rose Maylie turns out to be the long-lost sister of Agnes, and therefore Oliver's aunt. She marries her long-time sweetheart Harry, and Oliver lives happily with his saviour, Mr Brownlow, a man of great virtue.
- Charley Bates learns his lesson from Sikes's murder of Nancy and turns into an honest citizen.
- At last, Oliver has a family and an identity with Rose Maylie, his aunt. The novel has an ideal Victorian ending—one of poetic justice—Fagin is condemned to death, Sikes dies by his own hand, Mr Brownlow adopts Oliver, and Rose Maylie marries Harry, the son of the family who adopted her. From this unpromising institutional (workhouse) setting, finally emerges a fairy tale with a happy ending. Oliver is 'born for better things' and the author ensures a happy ending.

'The sun—the bright sun, that brings back, not light alone, but new life, and hope, and freshness to man—burst upon the crowded city in clear and radiant glory. Through costly-coloured glass and paper-mended window, through cathedral dome and rotten crevice, it shed its equal ray.'

Historical Background

- The novel seems to be inspired by the story of Robert Blincoe, an orphan whose story as a child labourer in a cotton mill was widely read in the 1830s. Dickens' own horrific childhood experiences of poverty are evident too. Oliver's name may have been based on Peter Tolliver, a young workhouse boy, whom Dickens knew personally. Oliver Twist's periodical sketches were illustrated by George Cruikshank.
- Till the 1815, the Napoleonic era lasted so England had been at war with France. The English government had imposed heavy taxes which were a burden on the poor. This brought in price rise and food scarcity. English imports stopped, leading to unemployment among workers. Also mechanisation made jobs obsolete.
- England in the 1830s—transformation from an agricultural, rural economy to an urban, industrial nation—working in miserable conditions in damp, dark, cold climate with hazardous machines, suffocating spaces, and meager pay—growth of slums and catacomb-like houses.
- The middle class suffered humiliation for having to work—now they promoted work as a moral virtue—anxious to be different from the lower classes, they insulted them as lazy good-for-nothings—subjected the poor to hatred and cruelty—established that earned wealth was a moral virtue.
- Victorian society took economic prosperity as a sign that God favoured the honest, successful individual's efforts—thus poverty was seen as a weakness of the poor individual—Poor Law of 1834.
- 19th century English Poor Laws—the Victorian middle class's emphasised on the goodness of hard work—middle class was getting as influential as the British aristocracy (who did not have to work for a living)—wanted political power with the landed class and a new voting system—orthodox religious movement and economic and political changes.

- Instead of helping, these charity centres and the Laws oppressed and exploited the defenseless, the children, the old and the sick leaving them suffering, diseased, dead, punished or abused by a corrupted system of judiciary that pretended to help. While the middle-class bureaucrats preached Victorian and Christian values they mistreated small children and the poor.
- Dickens made an appeal for the voiceless poor since he himself had suffered a miserable childhood with the English legal system that took every opportunity to harass the poor. The novel was more a social commentary of those times.
- 'Oliver Twist' is not a fairy tale about the poor little boy who ends up with a rich family. It is a voice to protest against the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which stated that 'all public charity must be channeled through workhouses'.
- Some preferred to die on the streets; beggars and debtors risked prison to avoid workhouses as the miserable places ensured that the poor did not rely on public assistance—it prevented the able-bodied paupers, 'lazy and idle bums', immoral and evil, to earn anything—such poor deserved no comforts or reliance on public help.
- In workhouses families were separated—the state became the surrogate parents of workhouse children (orphans or not)—meals were deliberately inadequate to encourage the residents to find work and support themselves.
- The workhouse was supposed to be a symbol of Christian charity and benevolence but instead of employing the poor and giving them a second chance, they made them pay in suffering and misery.
- Dickens makes a brave attempt at social reform by bringing to light the defects in the legal, educational and governing institutions. Yet his faith in the 'pure of heart' Oliver reflects his faith in the power of the people to initiate change for the better.

Contents

Introduction	*iii*
1. Oliver Asks for More	1
2. Fagin and the Boys	8
3. Stop Thief!	12
4. Bill Sikes Comes	18
5. Kindness—Lost	22
6. A Job for Oliver	28
7. A Robbery That Failed	34
8. Shadows on the Wall	38
9. Friends at Last	42
10. Watchers at the Window	48
11. Monks Meets Mr and Mrs Bumble	51
12. Nancy Talks	56

13. Fagin Is Worried 62

14. Murder! 66

15. Monks Is Forced to Confess 70

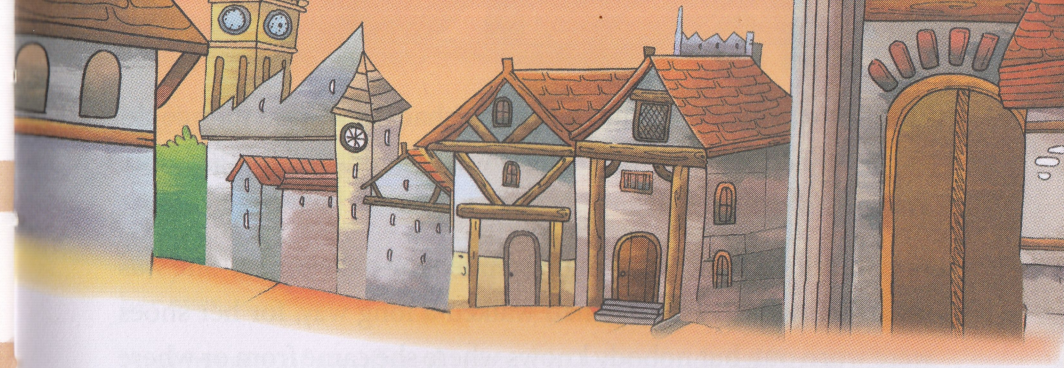
16. The End of Sikes 76

17. The Explanation 80

18. The Result 87

Notes 89

Test Your Understanding 100



1. Oliver Asks for More

About the year 1837, in a certain English town a baby boy was born in the local poorhouse. For several minutes after his birth, the sickly baby struggled feebly to breathe. The doctor, who was paid only a small sum by the town to look after the poor, and the old poorhouse woman who acted as nurse, did little to help him. However, the child Oliver, won his first lonely battle in life and, setting up a feeble cry, announced to the poorhouse that it had yet another mouth to feed. As the baby gave this first cry, his mother stirred under the thin coverlet on the iron bedstead and muttered feebly, 'Let me see the child, and die.'

The doctor turned round from the small fire where he was warming himself and said with unexpected kindness, 'Oh, you mustn't talk about dying yet.'

'Bless your heart, no!' said the wretched nurse, hastily putting down the bottle whose contents she was trying, 'wait till you've had thirteen children, like me, and seen them all die except two, and those two in the poorhouse with me!'

But it was no good. The mother shook her head, stretched out her arms for her child and the doctor gave it to her. She kissed it desperately, then put her hands to her face and fell back dead.